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Abstract

The number of foreign students has been increasing in Japan to help promote globalization as well as support a dwindling number of Japanese students available to attend its universities. Traditionally, the foreign student body at Toyo University had been made up of predominantly Chinese and South Korean students, but has changed recently to encompass a wider variety of students from other Asian countries. Once foreign students arrive, one of the main goals should be to interact in a variety of different settings to both increase language ability and access the culture, but different factors exist that possibly impede this goal. This study uses interview data from three second year students studying at Toyo University from countries other than the main countries which send students to Japan, and attempts to identify factors affecting their interactions since being in Japan. Results show each student has had unique experiences and, accordingly, has different needs. Universities like Toyo need to be aware of the needs of its changing body of study abroad students.

1. Introduction

Foreign interest in living and working in Japan has seen an increase over the past few years. This has led to situations such as an increase in the number of foreign spouses gaining permanent residency. Further, in a bid to cover shortages in skilled workers, particularly in the technology field, brought on by a falling birthrate, the government has created residence programs (Kingston, 2013). It's possible to say that Japan's foreign population looks set to rise over the coming years.

Over that same time period, there has also been a marked increase in the number of students choosing to come to Japan to study. According to JASSO (2019), in 2018 the total number of overseas students that came to study in Japan was just under 300,000; an increase of over 20,000 students from the previous year. Of those students, 94% came from Asia, with the top three countries sending students to Japan being China, Vietnam and Nepal.

The increase in study abroad numbers, as with the working situation, has partly been brought about as a result of government intervention. Back in 2008, the Japanese government launched the G30 project aimed at bringing 300,000 foreign students to Japan by 2020. Clearly, this goal has been exceeded. The main drive of that project was to showcase Japanese universities that had established English content courses as part of their curriculums. Traditionally, the language barrier had been an obstacle for those

wishing to come and study in Japan, but this project highlighted universities that it was hoped could compete alongside universities in English-speaking countries vying for those same students. The Japanese government further strengthened the goal of more study abroad students by additionally amending the Immigration Control Act in 2014 and allowing more students to become permanent residents in Japan and act as a crutch to help the dwindling domestic workforce.

On the surface, this situation seems desirable, but statistics cannot describe the whole story. First, Japan's goal was to open its universities to the world, expanding people, goods and money from all over the world. However, as stated, the overwhelming majority of students have come from a few Asian countries. Second, due to the constantly shrinking number of Japanese students moving into higher education, universities are increasingly turning to and admitting more international applicants from overseas that have only obtained low academic grades in order to remain financially buoyant and viable. Lastly, many of the students who are in Japan to study abroad remain at Japanese language schools, and indeed have little wish to move into tertiary education; instead preferring to concentrate on making money by working in places like restaurants and convenience stores.

As well as the potential quality of study abroad students dropping, a number of incidents have served to damage the reputation of institutions and their study abroad students. In one recent incident, NHK World (2019) reported that around 24% of those enrolled to join the Tokyo University of Social Welfare in 2018 actually went missing. The backlash against the university was strong for allowing this to happen, but so was the public perception of study abroad students seemingly using enrolment at university as simply a way to look for job, with little to no intention of studying at that university.

Further, the country sending the largest number of students to Japan, China, has seen its image ebb and flow in the minds of Japanese people over recent years. The Japantoday (2019) reports on the results of a survey carried out by a nonprofit group called the Genron NPO, along with the China International Publishing Group. It reported that 87.4% of Japanese respondents had an unfavorable view of China as well as 44.8% of Japanese respondents claiming that the relationship between Japan and China is either "bad" or "relatively bad." Reasons cited for these views include a lack of trust between the governments, and territorial issues between Japan and China over the Senkaku Islands. Although this is only one country, it shows cause for concern for study abroad students in or planning to come to Japan because of matters out of their control.

Many students choose to study abroad for not only improving language, which may lead to future job opportunities, but also to connect with the culture and understand the culture more deeply. Cultural interaction has been referred to as "behavior...that occurs when members of different cultural groups engage in joint activity," (Spencer-Oatey, Franklin, 2014, p.51). In the case of study abroad students, activity carries a diversity of meanings. It could imply the direct act of physical communication or more indirect participation a learning institution, such as a university. Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard (2006) state that although one can learn a language in one's home country, study abroad is vital to put people into contact with people from other cultures as countries look to develop more globally-minded citizens for future business. This is certainly the case in Japan, where globalization and the

pursuit of global human resources have been touted by the government as imperative for its future.

That is only half the story in Japan because interaction implies necessarily more than one party. However, for both parties to have benefit, both sides need to be willing participants in the interaction. In light of recent media reports, how foreign students are accepted in this country is an important issue to investigate.

Toyo University has also seen an increase in the enrolment of foreign students over recent years. These students have tended to come mainly from China and South Korea. However, students from other neighboring Asian countries are also on the rise. It is important that universities like Toyo understand the needs of these students in order to provide a more suitable learning environment. This study will address how students, particularly from non-traditional Asian countries sending students to Japan deal with the task of cultural interaction and factors that affect that at a Japanese university.

2. Literature Review

Research has been carried out into the issues that study abroad students from neighboring countries face during their time in Japan. One study by Wenhua and Zhe (2013) surveyed South Koreans and found five distinct problems, one of which was sociocultural issues. They report that some students felt discriminated against because of a strong sense of Japanese group-cohesion, emphasizing the exclusivity of groups or communities of Japanese people. Further, these students found the concepts of *honne* and *tatemae* difficult to negotiate. *Honne* refers to one's true feelings on a situation or idea, whereas *tatemae*, is more how those feelings are expressed based on how others outwardly react. This gap was said to be thought of as offensive and not honest.

Other research has focused on Chinese students. For example, Ikeguchi (2012) surveyed 100 Chinese students at Japanese universities and found that 55% of respondents believed that they were disliked by Japanese people. Along with other problems of language difficulties, the author claimed that Japanese universities do not address particular difficulties faced by study abroad students. In another study by Lee (2017), a Chinese student reported only associating with other Chinese students, who she felt could sympathize with her issues of living in Japan. This last point of only interacting with students from their own country is often leveled at study abroad students in Japan. Indeed, Kim (1988) states that it is necessary for foreigners to integrate into the host country in order to adapt to the environment. Conversely, those students that only associate with others from their home country are unlikely to integrate into the host culture.

As well as studies that view the struggles of foreign students, other researchers have attempted to chart varying phases of cultural adjustment for foreign visitors within a host country. The ease of cultural adjustment can be linked to how similar the host and visiting cultures are to each other, with more instances of cultural differences leading to more difficulty to adjust (Mori, 2000). Along the adjustment timeline come phases such as honeymoon, a period of wonder at the new culture, into culture shock, where the host culture becomes overwhelming, and difficult to adjust to because of its difference to the

visiting culture. From there, if students work through issues, comes recovery and eventually adjustment (reported in Hommadova, 2017).

Uehara (1998) states that due to specific cultural background phenomenon like collectivism, students were burdened in negotiating communication. Therefore, some researchers have measured the specific skills needed by foreign visitors to engage in Japanese. These include cognitive and behavioral strategies for maintaining interpersonal relationships (Tanaka & Okunishi 2016). These authors found that students with lower Japanese language proficiency could not approach Japanese people well and were poor at showing humility and non-verbal communication. Inability in approaching Japanese people, the authors state, could be a major cause of poor relationships between visitor and guest. Lastly, the authors conclude that notions such as interest in the culture, accepting the culture and the willingness to adopt emotional norms could well affect the level of depth in developing relationships for visitors.

The above studies focus predominantly on students from China and Korea, but recently students from a variety of different countries are coming to Japan to study. There is a paucity of studies that focus on students coming to Japan to study from other locales in Asia. However, it is important to understand a wide range of social interactions and ways that students are able or unable to relate to the culture as Japan attempts to globalize and make relationships with a growing number of countries from not only Asia, but the world. Therefore, this study aims to research attitudes and issues about interactions with Japanese culture and people held by foreign students from Asian countries who traditionally did not send students to Japan.

3. Methods

The data in this study was collected using qualitative techniques in order to find insights of a deeper nature. The author used individual interviews in English over the period of December 2019 to January 2020. Question formats for the interviews were based on guidelines set out by Spradley (1979, pp. 78-91), who advocated using a variety of different questions (see Appendix A for a sample of the questions used), including grand tour questions, which ask the interviewee to give a wide view of a situation. One such situation could be “Could you describe a typical day of interaction with Japanese students?” Next, experiential questions describe details on a specific event, and one example might be “Could you tell me about some experiences you had with meeting Japanese when you first arrived in Japan?” Lastly are probing questions which help to flush out more specific details within the grand tour questions such as “If time, money was not an issue what would be the best life in Japan for you?” Ideas for the above questions came from previous studies of adjustment in study abroad (Brockbank, 2011; Lee, 2017; and Tanaka & Okunishi, 2016). The Lee study was one of the only studies the author found that focused on students from non-neighboring countries to Japan, namely Vietnam and the Philippines.

The last stage of the methodology for this study involved the author reading thoroughly the transcripts from the individual interviews and grouping ideas into thought groups, which mainly followed some of the questions in Appendix A.

The students in this study were chosen as representatives from countries that have seen increases in number over recent years, namely Vietnam, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In 2012, the percentage of total number of students from these countries in Japan at tertiary level stood respectively at 3.2%, 1.8% and unreported (due to low level). Those figures rose to 23.1%, 8.01% and 2.8% in 2018 (JASSO, 2019). At the time of reporting, the three participants were all second years enrolled at Toyo and their details can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. *A brief personal summary of the participants in the study*

Student	Age	Time in Japan	Country
A	22M	4yrs	Nepal
B	21F	3yrs, 5mths	Sri Lanka
C	21F	3yrs, 5mths	Vietnam

The three participants were known to the author from around the Toyo campus and he approached them directly. The purposes of the research were explained along with the fact the research was voluntary and would not include their names. It was further stated that the data were for research purposes and that by agreeing to take part their tacit agreement to use the data was confirmed.

4. Results and Discussion

The results are presented in three topic groups, with an overview shown in Table 2. The remainder of this section will expand and give details of the points in the table.

Table 2. *A summary of results for participants in the study*

Student	4.1 Before arriving in Japan	4.2 Relations / interactions at part-time jobs	4.3 Relationships at Japanese university
A	no original plan to come, positive image of Japan	enjoys current job, able to interact with customer	outgoing, made lasting relationships
B	persuaded by teacher to come, goal of getting money in Japan	precarious position at work, difficult to be honest with colleagues	few friends, difficult to socialize due to money
C	no original plan to come, positive image of Japan	frustration in previous job, difficult to relate to colleagues in current job	difficulty making friends, others see her as aloof

4.1 Before arriving in Japan

All students had differing experiences before arriving in Japan. That also meant different motivations. On the one hand, both A and C had their plans changed and decided to come to Japan. Firstly, A studied Japanese, after he had failed to get into medical school in his home country, but he was satisfied with that result. Also, C had originally applied to take a university position but became interested in a

scholarship program that had been introduced in her high school in one of the Japanese language classes she took as an elective second language. Both of these students had had positive experiences of Japan before arriving. C said the following about Japan:

“...there is always a lot of image of Japanese people that they’re hardworking, they’re creative and welcoming with their hospitalities. That was my expectation first.”

C had formed these images from meeting Japanese people in her home country, from her teacher and from media images. Similarly, A claimed he had loved the Japanese culture since childhood, especially its technology, and had further spent time at the Japanese embassy and its library, as well going on a picnic with Japanese people he had met through the language school he had attended in his country. It was a fun experience he said.

Contrary to A and C, B had come to Japan for entirely different reasons. She admitted that she had come to Japan to primarily work. Her Japanese teacher told B that she would be able to work, and send money back to her family. This belief was reinforced by a visit from a Japanese student who came to her high school, telling her she would be able to work as much as she wanted. It was with this belief that she ultimately arrived in Japan, only to find out that she had been...

“...cheated by the teacher there.”

She had even spent almost a month’s wages in commission to that teacher, who she claims had misled her about what she would be able to do workwise in Japan. Whether she had been mistaken or cheated, this misapprehension would follow her to Japan, and be the source of continuing problems.

4.2 Relationships and interactions at part-time jobs

All students have different work experiences in Japan, and some changed jobs a number of times since being here, but all students’ work relationships seem to be going well now, despite some having bad experiences in their first jobs. For C, she changed jobs after nine months feeling she had to quit from a boss that both refused to teach her about the job workings, nor would show her a kind attitude; causing her stress at work. The following extract shows some of what happened:

“When I ask him and say I don’t understand, he sighs, and thinks I don’t understand any Japanese. There was a situation when we have to talk with some customers and I don’t know how to explain that because I’m just a part time worker and I don’t know about special campaign or how long does it last, so I asked. Every time I pushed the button to call the supervisor he came with an annoying face. He shows a bad attitude towards me.”

Since that job, she has settled on one of her current jobs as serving drinks in a Japanese sweets shop. She took this job because she enjoys the taste of the shop’s sweets, so decided to use this as a vehicle to finding a job there. She admits she found it strange that at this job, and her other job, in a supermarket, there were no other foreign students. She views this as a positive job feature because...

“...if there are foreigners there I will definitely ask them if they speak English. And then I’ll start talking in English.”

This means that she wants to use the job to improve her Japanese, or to move away from English,

which is definitely the stronger of her second languages. As for relationships at work, C claimed that it has been a little hard to find topics of mutual interest with co-workers because the staff in the supermarket she works at are older than her. They all have families and children, but she states they are kind nevertheless, and will talk about their families with her or explain about the specials for that week in the supermarket.

Compared to C, A seems to have much more depth of conversation at his current workplace. He works in a convenience store for the late night shift. He states that the job is not difficult but it can be frustrating, and he has thought about quitting on several occasions. What stops him from not going through with that is his sense of duty and friendship he has built up with his colleagues. At work he says that he converses on issues like international politics and economics, both peaking his interest and challenging him to push his Japanese ability further. As well as with staff, he also enjoys talking to customers that come in to his store at night and want to engage him in conversation. He says they ask about his country, and that he really likes receiving those questions.

Moving to B, her economic predicament leaves her in a precarious position at work. She has changed jobs three times already since coming to Japan, and now is holding down two jobs, one is in a restaurant and the other at a family restaurant. The problem stems from her wish to work as much as she can. One of the jobs knows she is near the permissible limit. She feels that this position holds back her ability to have good relationships at work. She says:

“In the supermarket they are like family. But I can’t tell them all the truth.”

She feels lucky, however, that she is able to share her problems with some of the staff, and she feels as though they are supporting her, giving advice and sometimes, at least, lending a friendly ear to her problems. She says that she arrives early to work to talk with her co-workers, but this is also partly because it is stressful sharing an apartment with another woman from the same country.

4.3 Relationships at the Japanese university

The students have varying success with relationships at university. Firstly, C says she has no best friend similar to what she would have in her home country. She goes on to state that..

“...I have two or three people who will wave at me when I come into the room, and I can ask them about something from the class.”

However, she claims to sit by herself in class because she wants to concentrate on the contents of the class, rather than chatting. She attributes her lack of friends to both her shyness and her wish to study greatly in the first year, the time at which many of the relationships formed will carry through into later years at university. She admits that some Japanese could see her as being aloof. This pressure to be in a group is something C takes steps to avoid. She had not joined a university circle for the same reason. She said the following...

“No, I don’t like groups. Groups in (my home country) is like more independent than in Japan and we have our own lives too and rarely meet and talk to each other. But even though it’s one year or three years we meet again, we will talk like we have just met yesterday. But Japanese people need

to talk and stick in the group every day. It's hard to catch up with that."

It appears hard for C to be able to deal with the expectations that being part of a group brings in Japan. She also wishes that students can communicate better in English. When she took part in an English camp activity, some of the other participants took her to be a leader as her English was better than others. However, she felt disappointed that when it came time at the end of the camp for others to use whatever language they wanted. She expressed disappointment that they chose to revert back to using Japanese...

"In the last night when we are allowed to use our own language, they were super surprised when I spoke Japanese. They look at me like an alien. Then they started to talk all in Japanese. When I asked them why don't you try English I will teach you more and we can communicate together because it's the purpose of this event but they won't do that."

It is clear that C really wants to make the most of her time in Japan, and wishes others would make that academic journey with her.

As well as C, B also had not done so well with friends in university. She made one friend in the first year with whom she could confide everything about herself. She claims that the Japanese students and foreign students appear to have different interests. One of the reasons for differences is money. She thinks that most of the Japanese students come from rich families as their families pay their tuition. While she, on the other hand, is experiencing difficulties paying the coming tuition. Money also appears to limit her interaction with Japanese students. She feels pressure to spend money if she goes out with Japanese friends, so she usually uses work as an excuse to decline such invitations. Her additional complaint about relationship in Japan is that...

"Japanese are changing their attitudes very fast, so it's difficult to communicate."

She says this because she feels like people ignore her when there should be some kind of shared greeting expected. One of the reasons she postulates is because of stress in society. Her life appears so much busier in Japan than her home country. She feels that this is also the case for Japanese people and it can affect how people build and maintain relationships with each other.

Lastly, for A, he had fared much better in relationships at university. Unlike C and B, he had made friends in the first year that he has remained with into the second year. He claims that he can make friends easily, and is, indeed, quite an outgoing student. He relies on these friends to help him understand the content of Japanese lectures. He goes out with these friends from between two to four times a month, usually for drinking parties. Perhaps the combination of him being a male that likes to drink and having an outgoing personality means he can make and maintain relationships better than other foreign students.

There was agreement from all students that Toyo University presented many opportunities for Japanese and foreign students to mix and meet. However, for B, the money issues arises again. She says that the university does not have any real idea of students like herself.

"I think (Toyo university) don't know students like me because it's all about money. They think foreign students are rich and getting money from the parents. Toyo must think about this situation deeply before inviting more international students because every international student do not have such a wealthy background or wealthy parents to support them as Toyo expecting."

All students saw value in the conversation lounge provided by the university, and many had been there to practice English. However, there were mixed feelings about the university's efforts in matching Japanese and foreign students for language and cultural exchange - one Japanese student with one foreign student. B, for example, was happy that she had met her best friends through the program, but for A, his initial partner would miss planned appointments, and this led to him giving up the program. He followed up by saying that making actual friends is a much more valuable experience than such programs. Lastly, C was thinking about taking part in similar programs, but had refrained from doing so because of reports she had heard. For example, she heard that foreign students were simply relying too much on Japanese students to take notes in the more difficult lectures. She did not want to be in that situation. She, like A, thinks that foreign students can't communicate with other Japanese students, unless those people are willing to do so.

5. Conclusion

Although the interviews with the three participants were over a limited period, some interesting points were raised. As Kim (1998) states, students need to integrate into the environment in order to succeed in their language abilities. This was carried out with varying degrees of success. For A, he is confident in his Japanese and has managed to maintain good grades. This has been in part due to his friendships with Japanese students who helped some of his language comprehension issues. Further, A is confident and outgoing and has adjusted to building relationships in Japan. For C, her drive to study appears to be much stronger than students around her. Also, coupled with the fact that her personality is somewhat shy, has slightly reduced her interaction with Japanese students. Lastly, B, has made only one real friend that she can truly confide in and appears to have money problems. Financial considerations appear to control her perceived ability to make and maintain relationships with Japanese.

In light of what has been revealed above, there are some steps Toyo University should take to alleviate such problems. Firstly, and most importantly, is the realization that universities may not be equipped to address the needs of a variety of different study broad students (Ikeguchi, 2012). In the case of B, there should be more access to hardship funds, and an understanding that students coming from less economically-powerful countries will be at a disadvantage to Japanese and students from neighboring countries. This assistance could also take the form of psychological counseling to try to navigate students through times of difficulty when they have seemingly no one at hand to talk to (Ikeguchi, 2012). Next, instructors who have foreign students in their classes need to take the initiative to get to know such students and create informal channels of communication through SNS (Lee, 2017). Lastly, in university exchange programs when matching foreign and Japanese students, all students should be made aware of the responsibilities that await them in joining such programs. For Japanese students, this means realizing that foreign students may have different goals from them, but that this is a chance for learning. To help this situation, future programs could allocate several Japanese students to several foreign students and that way, if there was a case of mismatch, there would be other students available to

meet and continue with.

As the number of foreign students increases in Japan, so must the care with which they are welcomed. As Japanese students dwindle in number, foreign students will be an important source of income for private Japanese universities and; indeed, will be necessary for Japan to survive. Thus, universities need to take steps in caring for students of all nationalities.

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Appendix A -Types of questions for the Interview

Name _____ age _____ country _____ time in Japan _____

Grand Tour questions – ask the interviewee to take you on a journey of their thoughts

"Could you describe the main things that brought you to Japan in the first place?"

"Could you describe a typical day of interaction with Japanese students?"

Experience questions – designed to get interviewee to talk about experience of one event / situation

"Could you tell me about some experiences you had with Japanese while in your country?"

"Could you tell me about some experiences you had with meeting Japanese when you first arrived in Japan?"

Probing questions – trying to get more specific information that fits the interviewee

How is Japan now different from your expectation?

What have you done to adjust to life in Japan?

What type of language use do you have in Japan?

How do you decide when or who to communicate with Japanese people?

What do you assume to be true about how Japanese interact with each other and foreign students...?

What surprises you about being in Japan?

What is the best thing that could happen between you and Japanese people? (ideal)

If time, money was not an issue what would be the best life in Japan for you?

What do you think Toyo should do to improve interaction between Japanese and foreign students?

Which is more important for your life / future life, English or Japanese language study?

If you were a teacher charged with bring students together, what would you do in this situation?

What are you most afraid will happen in Japan?

How do you feel when you do part-time job or in classes?

Have you felt any discrimination before? How about culture shock?

東洋大学での留学生の声

ロブソン、グライアム

我が国における外国人留学生の数は、グローバル化の促進のためのみならず、交換留学生として日本人学生を当該大学に留学させるために増加してきた。従来、外国人学生は主に中国、韓国からの学がその数を占めてきたが、近年その他のアジアの国の学生も増加している。学生が受入国に到着すると、その交流は学習する言語の能力を向上させるだけでなく、その国の文化に触れる機会となり、さまざまな要素がその目標となる。本研究は、東洋大学で学習する様々なアジアの国から2年生3名を対象にインタビューを行い、日本で行われた交流の問題点を検討することである。その結果は、それぞれの学生は彼らのニーズに従い、特別な体験をする機会を得たことを示していた。東洋大学は、変化する外国人留学生のニーズを理解する必要があることが示唆された。